DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 466 840 JC 020 518

AUTHOR Matkowski, Bette
TITLE Getting Started: The First Year of Service Learning at Community College Vermont.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 9p.; Presented at the 6th Annual Campus Compact National Conference, May 21-23, 1997.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/organizations/community/compact/eventpapers.h
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Educational Innovation; Experiential Learning; Progr Implementation; School Community Programs; *Service Learning; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Community College of Vermont

ABSTRACT

This report outlines the development and implementation of a service-learning program at the Community College of Vermont (CCV). The author describes some of CCV's unique characteristics, all of which heightened the challenge of implementing a service-learning program: (1) CCV has no campus-there are 12 sites of the college scattered throughout the major population centers of the state; (2) CCV employs only part-time faculty, hiring instructors on a semester-by-semester, course-by-course basis; (3) CCV students are very autonomous and can design their own degrees. In the fall semester of 1996, CCV piloted the service-learning program at one site: Middlebury. Four instructors volunteered to spearhead the program. They met five times throughout the semester; at the end, instructors and students met to review the program. There was fervent college-wide support, although the program was small in scope. Students and faculty learned from and enjoyed the service-learning project, and CCV garnered strong regional and national support. In spring 1997 the pilot program was greatly expanded, calling for a four-credit course specifically designed to incorporate service learning into students' academic careers. The college-wide course requires 15 hours of classroom meetings, 120 hours of field study, and 30-40 hours of homework. This paper details course objectives and suggests evaluation strategies. (EMH)

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Getting Started: The First Year of Service Learning at Community College of Vermont

Bette Matkowski

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Community College of Vermont: At a Glance

ED 466 840

Community College of Vermont was founded in 1970 and became a member of the Vermont State Colleges system in 1977. It is the only community college in Vermont although there are several private two-year colleges and one public two-year college (Vermont Technical College).

Nearly 8000 students attend CCV each year; 98% of them are Vermont residents. The college's tuition is currently $96 a credit, and a typical 3-credit course costs approximately $360. While expensive by national standards, CCV has the lowest tuition in Vermont. 75% of all CCV students are women, and the average age is 30-32; however, younger, full-time students are one of the fastest growing populations of the college.

The mission of the college is to deliver high quality, affordable, postsecondary education to students in their communities in innovative and flexible ways. Special emphasis is given to Vermonters who would otherwise have limited access to college because of such barriers as low income, lack of academic preparation, family obligations, time constraints, or geographic remoteness.

There are several particularly interesting features of CCV:

- No campus: rather than building a campus and having students come to it, CCV was designed to reach out to rural Vermont (Vermont is the U.S.'s 2nd most rural state). There are 12 sites of the college scattered throughout the major population centers of the state. 95% of all Vermonters are within a 30 minute drive of a CCV site. Sites range from the

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largest in Burlington where 1100 students attend each semester to the smallest in Bennington where 170 students attend each semester. The college owns no property and rents all of its sites which are moved or expanded to meet population and program needs;

- No full-time faculty: CCV hires instructors on a semester by semester, course by course basis. The college hires as many as 700 instructors a year to teach nearly 2000 courses a year. The reliance on part-time instructors allows CCV to offer flexible, varied academic programs within each site. The current instructor stipend is $1262 per three-credit course. Academic advising and planning are managed by Coordinators of Academic Services who work in each site of the college;
- Characteristics of the academic program: CCV students may design their own degrees, with assistance from a Coordinator of Academic Services, or they may choose among several more prescriptive options. Students receive detailed course descriptions, along with grading criteria (for those students who elect grades rather than pass-fail), at the first class of the semester and narrative evaluations of their academic achievement at the end of each class. Students are strongly encouraged to begin their academic careers at CCV with Dimensions of Learning, a course similar to a freshman seminar, and to conclude their academic careers at CCV with Seminar in Educational Inquiry, a course similar to a senior seminar. CCV also has a very strong and active Assessment of Prior Learning program, and the college is now piloting online courses.

The Challenges of Service Learning at CCV

The characteristics which set CCV apart from many community colleges also posed some of the major challenges which faced CCV's decision to offer service learning.

- The challenge of part-time instructors: since CCV has no full-time faculty to recruit for service learning activities, the college had to find other ways of engaging instructors. CCV piloted service learning in one site--Middlebury-for Fall 1996 semester and asked for instructors to volunteer to learn more about and to incorporate service learning into their courses.

Four instructors volunteered: Margaret Hutchinson-Betts, Theories of Personality and Human Growth and Development; Bette Matkowski, Women and Management; Tere Topoleski, English Composition; Marie Troppe, Dimensions of Learning.

Each was offered a stipend of $50 per credit. The four instructors met once with Donna Duffy, a professor of psychology at Middlesex Community College and project faculty member for Campus Compact, and also met an additional four times throughout the semester to review the successes and concerns they were facing. Bette Matkowski, who is a senior administrator at CCV, managed the administrative support for the pilot project. At the end of the semester, the instructors and students from their classes met to review the first semester of service learning at CCV. While these meetings were productive and useful, it was clear that CCV could not sustain service learning in this time-intensive model. It was also clear that CCV could not train 700 instructors a year in incorporating service learning into their courses.

- The challenge of geographical dispersity: CCV acknowledged the challenge of offering service learning in 12 sites by simply piloting service learning in only one site during the Fall semester. The Successes of the Service Learning Pilot Project

Even though the project was piloted for one semester in one site only, there were some notable successes, among them:

- Instructors enjoyed the project: all four instructors agreed that they would continue to be interested in service learning opportunities although all four also agreed that they would modify or alter the ways in which they incorporated service learning into their courses;
- Students learned from the project: In December 1996 instructors and students who participated in service learning came together to discuss the successes and challenges of the semester. In all cases, students acknowledged the learning that took place although there were varying degrees of satisfaction with the concept of service learning (one instructor required service learning; three did not). A survey given to students in all 5 classes at the beginning and end of the semester did not indicate any marked differences in the attitudes toward service, but it was premature to draw many conclusions from the sample;
- There was immediate, college-wide support for the project: although small in scope, the project was highly visible within the college community and attracted enough interest that the Dean of Academic Services and the appropriate academic committees expedited the approval process for the resulting course. A senior administrator volunteered to convene and chair a task force for the coming academic year;
- Strong regional and national support of CCV's efforts: from the earliest contacts with CCV in the Spring of 1996, Campus Compact provided regional and national support of the pilot project in a number of ways: with Professor Donna Duffy's visit to CCV in Middlebury in the Summer of 1996, to invitations and financial support for visits to regional and national meetings and conferences, to the invitation to participate in the 6th national conference of the Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges. CCV's early efforts were also greatly enhanced by the participation of Marie Troppe, a

former project associate for Campus Compact who is now an instructor and Coordinator of Academic Services at CCV.

CCV's Adaptations of Service Learning for 1997-98

The review of the service learning pilot project convinced CCV that the model it adopted in Middlebury for Fall 1996 was not sustainable. A small task force convened throughout Spring 1997 to revise the pilot project. These are the characteristics of the revised service learning project for CCV for 1997/98:

- A 4 credit course specifically designed to incorporate service learning into students' academic careers: rather than trying to incorporate service learning into many courses, CCV crafted a 4 credit course that focused on service learning (course description attached). The course was broadened to include field experiences which had been an ongoing challenge for the college to support as well. Some concentrations at CCV, such as Human Services, required a 3-6 credit field experience, but these were completed by students entirely outside their classroom experience. In both cases, CCV wanted a student to combine a classroom experience with service learning or field experience. The resulting course is "Community and Work Experience," a 4-credit course that will require 15 hours of classroom meetings, 120 hours of field study (service learning or field experience), and 30-40 hours of homework.

Instructors will receive a 4-credit stipend (currently $1683); they will receive college training and ongoing support in service learning and field experiences. Enrollment in this class will be at the college's class size average of 12.5. Instructors will assist students in crafting an individualized course description and learning contract. Instructors will visit the community or work site twice during the semester. Students will also receive a narrative evaluation at the end

of the course that will combine the instructor's observations and the agency or business' observations.

Students must have 12-20 credits of prior college-level learning to enroll in the course, and they are strongly encouraged to meet with a Coordinator of Academic Services before enrolling in the course.

Students who qualify for federal work-study money may receive work-study funds for their service learning or field experience. While CCV is comfortable with the philosophical premises of this situation (some students receiving payment for their participation in this course, and some not), the details are not yet worked out;

- College-wide coordination of the course: a small task force, comprised of a senior administrator as chair, several Coordinators of Academic Services and instructors, will oversee the offering of the course in four sites this Fall semester; the task force will insure that instructors of the course have the academic and administrative support they need. This task force will be charged with reviewing and revising the project as necessary.

NEW COURSE PROPOSAL

Community and Work Experience

Credits 4

Classroom hours 15

Lab hours 120

Other 40 (homework)

Semester to be offered Fall 97 Suggested division (=letter code) to be determined

CATALOG DESCRIPTION (60 words or less)

An opportunity for students to connect classroom learning to experience in a workplace or community setting. Students design a field study that meets their personal goals. Classroom component includes critical analysis and reflection on work, service to the community, the roles and responsibilities of citizens, and the relationship between learning and the field study. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with an academic advisor before enrolling in this class. Required prior learning: 12-20 credits of college-level learning

DRAFT OF ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, the successful student will be able to:

- Clarify and reflect on personal career goals; examine the settings, challenges, and opportunities of various professions;
- Identify personal goals for the field study and design a field study experience that assists the student in meeting those goals;
- Demonstrate effective participation (eg., communication, teamwork, appropriate workplace habits) in a work or community setting;
- Integrate academic understanding, skills, and knowledge through a community or workplace experience, in the private or public sector;
- Describe the implications of work and/or community within the social, economic, and political order;
- Examine the roles and responsibilities of citizens within their communities and/or workplaces; assess the ways in which an individual can contribute to the workplace or community;

- Enhance and transform the experiential learning gained through a process of reflection, conceptualization, and the exploration of ways it can be generalized to other settings.

POSSIBLE TEXT(S) AND OTHER RESOURCES

Service Learning Reader: Reflections and Perspectives on Service. Edited by Gail Albert and the Staff of the Center for Service-Learning, University of Vermont, published by National Society for Experiential Education (1994)

SUGGESTED EVALUATION STRATEGIES (ways to measure student's successful completion of course objectives)

- Regular attendance at classroom meetings;
- Development of a learning contract for workplace or community experience;
- Successful fulfillment of learning contract;
- Completion of all assignments;
- 120 hours in workplace or community setting;
- Feedback from a supervisor in the workplace or community setting;
- Student self-assessment

To: NICOLE SEYMOUR

FAX 310 206 8095

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Signature:	Printed Name/Position/Title: BETTE MATKOWSKI PRESIDENT
Organization/Address: 2401 South Main, Lamar CO 81052 LAMAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE	Telephone: 719 336 1512 / FAX: —
	E-Mail Address: BETTE.MATKOWSKI@LCC.CCCOES.EDU / Date: 7/02

To Nicole Seymour	From Beth Matkowski
Co./Dept.	Co.
Phone #	Phone # 319-336-1512
Fax # 310-206-8095	Fax #

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